Met Office

December 2004

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1961-1990.

UK overview

A dry month across most southern and eastern areas of the UK. Most parts of north-west Scotland had above or well above average rainfall. Mean temperatures were above average, with the highest anomalies over Scotland, and the lowest anomalies over south-east England. Sunshine levels generally above average, with the best of the sunshine over northern England.

Kinbrace (Highlands) recorded a temperature of -15.2 °C on 19th. Colwyn Bay (Conwy) recorded a temperature of 16 °C on 30th.

England and Wales diary of highlights

Generally dry for the first two weeks. More unsettled during the second half of the month. Colder for a while, with some snow in the last week, but milder for the closing days.

1st to 3rd: The month started with temperatures close to average but it was cold where there was persistent fog. A weak front edged south but only gave small amounts of rain during the opening days. Some areas had good sunny spells. Newquay (Cornwall) logged 6.6 hours of sunshine on the 1st, Falmouth (Cornwall) and Scarborough (North Yorkshire) recorded 6.2 hours on the 2nd. The temperature only reached 3 °C at Shoreham (West Sussex) on the 3rd, where fog lingered all day.

4th to 8th: Temperatures recovered for a few days as the wind turned more westerly and at Torquay (Devon) the temperature reached 13.6 °C on the 4th, followed the next day by 13.8 °C at Falmouth (Cornwall). Cloud was variable so there was some overnight fog and frost. A weak front brought dull and drizzly weather to central England and Wales on the 7th, and southern parts on the 8th.

9th to 13th: High pressure over the Continent was close enough to keep most places dry. A weak warm front brought some drizzle to north Wales on the 11th. As a south-easterly wind developed on the 12th and 13th, it became dull and misty in many areas. By the 13th it was cold or very cold in south-east England and at High Wycombe (Buckinghamshire) the maximum temperature only reached 0.7 °C all day.

14th to 17th: The wind turned to the west or south-west bringing milder temperatures. There was some chiefly light rain across northern parts on the 14th but over Cumbria and west facing slopes there was copious rain. Shap Fell (Cumbria) logged 40.8 mm during the period 09-21 GMT. A small but deep low pressure centre quickly crossed southern parts on the 17th, bringing strong winds. Gusts to 70 knots were logged at Berry Head (Devon) and 67 knots at Lee-on-Solent (Hampshire). There were reports of a squall line and unconfirmed reports of tornadoes at Cowes (Isle of Wight), Poole (Dorset), Fareham and Waterlooville (both Hampshire) and Brede (East Sussex).

18th to 23rd: Showers early on the 18th gave way to a slow moving band of rain, lying from Anglesey to Essex by the end of the day, with some local snow over Wales. This rain area retreated back south on the 19th. Saunton Sands (Devon) had 49.5 mm of rain in the 24 hours ending 1800 GMT on the 19th. The 20th started with a sharp frost in places, Benson (Oxfordshire) and Topcliffe (North Yorkshire) recorded -7 °C. There was some rain or sleet in many areas on the 20th and one to two hours of snow over northern England in the afternoon. The 21st was dry for most. It briefly turned milder on the 22nd and 23rd but increasingly windy.

24th to 28th: A cold front and associated rain cleared the south-east on the 24th. This was followed by showers, and these turned wintry over Wales and western England. The 25th was a cold or very cold day and at Spadeadam (Cumbria) the temperature stayed below freezing all day with a maximum of just -0.2 °C. Further snow showers fed in across north-west England, the Midlands and also across south-west England and south-west Wales as troughs developed. Many places were sunny on the 26th. At Buxton (Derbyshire) the maximum only reached 0.6 °C. Further wet weather spread across Wales and western parts on the 27th, clearing the south-east in the early hours of the 28th. As it cleared there was some hail, squally winds and a sharp drop in temperature. A gust of 63 knots was reported at Capel Curig (Gwynedd) at 2200 GMT on the 27th and 22 mm of rain in the two hours to that time. There were reports of possible tornadoes at Wigan (Greater Manchester), Haverfordwest (Pembrokeshire) and Bridgwater (Somerset).

29th to 31st: Much milder weather closed the year although it remained rather cold in the south-east on the 29th. Patchy rain edged east on the 29th, clearing the south-east on the 30th. Colwyn Bay (Conwy) reached 16 °C on the 30th, the highest temperature for the month. A cold front cleared the south-east on the 31st with most places having some sunny spells.

Scotland diary of highlights

During the first half of December Scotland was covered by mild and cloudy westerly winds blowing around a large anticyclone over Europe. The westerly winds continued during the second half of the month but this time they were blowing around deep depressions passing to the north. Consequently there were several bouts of wet and windy weather and some outbreaks of colder air from the north. One of these was perfectly timed to give a white Christmas over many places.

During the first two days of December a large anticyclone near the Azores extended a ridge towards Scotland to give quiet weather. There were sunny spells in many places but fog or low cloud in others with a minimum temperature of -6 °C at Strathallan.

A long spell of benign west or south-westerly winds began on the 3rd and lasted until the 12th. The weather was generally mild and cloudy, but with sunny intervals in the east and some spells of wind and rain in the north-west. One of the mildest days was the 5th when the minimum temperature at Machrihanish was 10 °C and the maximum at Altnaharra was 13 °C. The previous day there was 40 mm of rain at Cassley in Sutherland while Broadford experienced 33 mm on the 8th. There were gales in Shetland on the 7th with Sella Ness recording a gust of 76 m.p.h.

The mild south-westerly winds continued on the 13th and 14th but as the European High receded there was heavy rain in the Western Highlands, with Sloy receiving a two-day total of 103 mm.

Between the 15th and the 17th a deep depression moved across Iceland and into the Norwegian Sea. Over Scotland there was rain or showers with strong winds and a gust of 74 m.p.h. was recorded at Barra.

The next low tracked east across the south of England so that Scotland experienced a quiet interlude on the 18th and 19th. The weather was mainly fair but the clear skies and light winds allowed the temperature to fall to -15 °C in several Highland glens.

Between the 20th and the 23rd the depressions resumed their track from the Atlantic to the Norwegian Sea bringing disturbed weather to Scotland. On the 21st there was 53 mm of rain at Cassley and a gust of 72 m.p.h. at Lerwick. This was followed by 45 mm of rain at Sloy and a gust of 82 m.p.h. at Loch Glascarnoch on the 23rd. On the 22nd the temperature rose to 13 °C at Aboyne and never fell below 11 °C at Machrihanish.

Over the Christmas period low pressure became slow moving in the Norwegian Sea, winds veered into the north-west and cold air spread south across Scotland. On Christmas Eve rain over the south turned to snow for a while and on Christmas Day snow showers affected all northern and western districts. A snow depth of 14 cm was reported from Kirkwall. Boxing Day was sunny in most places.

During the last five days of December deep depressions resumed their tracks from Iceland to the Norwegian Sea. Scotland experienced alternations between spells of mild and wet weather on some days to drier but colder conditions on others.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

Very mild again but a white Christmas.

Apart from some morning frost on the 2nd, much of the first two weeks resembled November - that is, mostly dry and very mild. The first 14 days seeing mostly insignificant amounts of rain. The second half of the month became progressively more unsettled and there were several wet spells. Although there were still some very mild days, the second half of the month was more seasonal with day-time temperatures close to average.

Arctic air arrived late on Christmas Eve and a classic 'white Christmas' occurred with 5 to 10 cm of snow on the ground by daybreak on the 25th. This cleared from many areas again on Boxing Day, and the closing days of the month were often quite mild but with some heavy spells of rain.

Temperatures for the month were well above normal once again and it was quite a sunny month in places. Parts of the Ards Peninsula had their driest December since 1975. The occurrence of night-time frost was below the long term average.

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